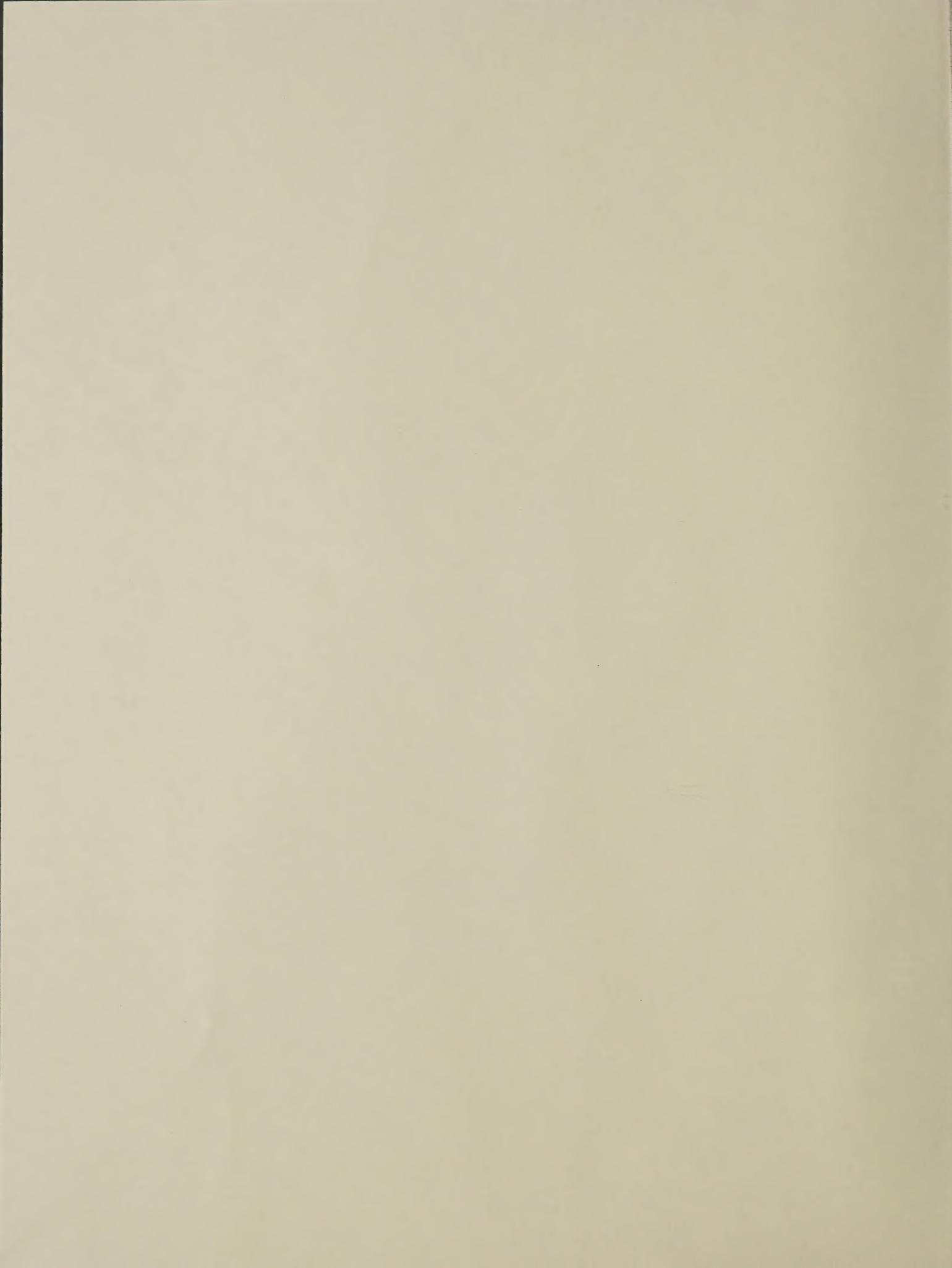


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A SOUTH SEA ADVENTURE

THE TRAGIC EXPERIENCE OF A RESIDENT OF LEBANON
COUNTY ON THE ISLAND OF ST. MATTHIAS IN
THE BISMARCK ARCHIPELAGO

PAPER READ BEFORE THE

LEBANON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

APRIL 24, 1931

BY . . .

PROF. THOS. S. STEIN, A.M.
OF ALLENTOWN, PA.

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the Chaldees, or revelations in the Valley of the Nile.¹ Messages come from the Antipodes, from the Equator, and from the Poles, and this expansion is not only in thought, but in deed also. Since the Spanish-American War, we have extended our possessions southward to Porto Rico and westward across the Pacific to the Philippines. During the past year our Byrd has even flown over the South Pole. Thus the citizen in his arm chair, while scanning the newspaper, almost feels like Terence, when he wrote: "I am a man, and I regard nothing that relates to man foreign to me."²

As a final link that maintains our interest in the South Sea, I would state that there resides in East Hanover Township, Lebanon County, a railroad engineer³ who acted a prominent part in the tragedy here presented. After he had passed through the thrilling scenes narrated in this paper, he decided to migrate to America, and now he is one of us, enjoying calmer days as life's advancing years increase.

On April 22, 1901, there came to the agent of Bruno Mencke, Hannover,⁴ Germany, the sad news from Cooktown, Australia, that his principal was murdered in the South Sea Archipelago. Bruno's father, Eberhard Mencke, had been an industrial magnate of Brunswick. Later he removed to Hannover and there ended his career, dying when his son was quite young, leaving him a large fortune.

Until of age, Bruno lived a retired life. But he took great interest in deep-sea investigation and planned an expedition for this purpose. Accordingly he bought the yacht "Princess

1. Homo sum et humani a me nil alienum puto.

2. See the end of this paper for a brief sketch of the character referred to—Mr. Hugo E. Krebs.

3. We purposely retain the German spelling of Hannover (two p's, with accent on second syllable) as distinguished from Eng. "Hanover" (one n, with accent on the first syllable).

"Alice" from the Prince of Monaco,¹ who likewise was deeply interested in exploring the depths of the seas. The "Princess Alice" had been built especially for nautical purposes. When bought by Herr Mencke she was put into dock at Hamburg for three months and was almost rebuilt. She was rechristened "Eberhard", in honor of the owner's father. Before starting out on the voyage to the South Sea, some time was spent in Kiel Bay and Canal, which connects the Baltic with the North Sea. In the Bay regattas are annually held, as at Cowes, Eng. Steam and sail yachts compete for prizes. The command of the yacht was given to Capt. Voogdt, of Papenheim, a town of Hannover, on the river Ems. The vessel was provisioned for a long stay in the Tropics, the canned goods amounting to 14,000 marks in value, equal to about \$3500.

Of the yacht's journey to its destination in the South Sea, we have no record, except that at Singapore, in the East Indies, Herr Mencke, the head of the expedition proved his manhood by rescuing a sailor from drowning. Here the yacht changed captains and proceeded to New Guinea.

On board the "Eberhard" was Dr. Heinroth, formerly of the Zoological Gardens of Berlin, but now a member of the expedition, having joined it in the interests of science, and serving as ship's physician.

On arrival at New Guinea, the "Eberhard" sailed from Herbertshoehe² for the island of St. Matthias. This was the middle of March, 1901. She was fully manned, including the newly-appointed reporter and private secretary, Herr Caro, aged 24 years, earlier in the employ of the government. Investigation

1. Monaco is the smallest sovereign state of Europe; with the exception of the Vatican. It lies in the very heart of the Riviera, in the southeastern part of France, on the Mediterranean coast, nine miles east of Nice. "The Maritime Alps rise tier on tier behind it, whilst before stretches the sea, peerlessly blue at midday, and in the glow of sunset glittering with iridescent colors, like a vast expanse of molten opals." Monaco has an area of only 3.34 sq. mi. and a population of 25,000. It has attained an unenviable notoriety, because of its famous gambling resort of Monte Carlo.

2. Herbertshoehe (Herbert's Heights) was the seat of the German Government, ten miles east of Matupi, on the north coast of New Guinea. (One's interest is enhanced by consulting a good atlas or encyclopedia.)

of the island and confirmation of reports concerning the hitherto little-known natives were planned.

The island of St. Matthias lies north-east of New Guinea 150° E. Long., not far south of the Equator. It is about $11\frac{1}{2}$ miles long and is 290 m.¹ from the seat of the German Government at Herbertshohe. Since the World War, the island has been under the mandate of Australia. It is a part of the Bismarck Archipelago. Towards the south of St. Matthias are a number of small islands, on one of which was a German station of two trepang² fishermen.

A camp was pitched on the main island (St. Matthias), near the southeast coast, almost twelve miles distant. The island was difficult to reach, because of numerous coral reefs. The camp was located on a bank 66 feet above sea-level, 160 feet from the top. It cleared 320 feet in a circle. No means of defense was at hand. Dense woods surrounded it. It was pitched along a path frequented by the natives, as there was no open ground and no beach.

About sixteen tents and huts were erected. Two European sleeping-tents were placed in the middle on a slight elevation, the others widely scattered to within 30 feet of the edge of the woods. Each sleeping-tent had two cots, and the space not occupied was equal to the space taken up by the cots.

The island was covered with tropical vegetation, cocoa and betel palms abounded. There are said to be one thousand species of palms, varying greatly in form, size and usefulness. From the bark are made rope and matting; from the leaves come baskets, huts and fans. The fibre of the nut furnishes coarse cloth, sails, and fishing nets. The sap yields sugar and wine, the green fruit milk, the ripe fruit solid food, and from the kernel comes rich oil for lamps and hair. The terminal bud (a

1. Distances are given in the original mss. in the metric system. We give approximate equivalents.

2. The trepang (*Holothuria edulis*) belongs to the echinoderms, a class of sea animals allied to the star-fish and sea urchin. They are taken in large quantities, dried and smoked, and then shipped to China, where they are highly esteemed for making soup.

sort of cabbage formation) provided the soldiers of Cyrus's ill-fated expedition with nourishment on the retreat of the ten thousand, as Xenophon informs us in the *Anabasis*.

The betel palms which have a slender trunk and bear reddish nuts, have a peculiar use. The seeds are wrapped with a bit of lime in the leaves of the betel pepper, and chewed like tobacco. It stains the teeth black, but this is regarded as adding to one's beauty. One writer estimates that one-tenth of the human race is addicted to this habit.

John L. Stoddard in his fine lectures, speaks of the palm as follows: "What infinite variety the palm tree has; now dwarfed in height, yet sending out on every side a mass of thick green leaves; now rising straight as an obelisk from the desert sand and etching its fine feathery tufts against the sky; now bearing luscious fruit of different kinds; now furnishing material for clothing, fishing nets and matting; or putting forth those slender fronds, frequently twenty feet in length, which are sent north by florists to decorate dwellings and churches for festivals and weddings."

"The palm is typical of the south, as the pine is of the north. One hints to us of brilliant skies, a tropical sun and an easy indolent existence; the other of bleak mountains and forests of northern hills, and symbolizes the conflict there between man and nature; in which both fortitude and daring have been needful to make man the conqueror. One finds a fascination in contrasting these two children of old Mother Earth and thinks of Heine's lines:

"A pine tree standeth lonely
On a northern mountain's height;
It sleeps while around it is folded
A mantle of snowy white.

"It is dreaming of a palm tree
In a far-off Orient land,
Which lonely and silent waiteth
On the desert's burning sand."

But this is rather a palmiferous digression from the narrative.

We were locating the camp when the tropical vegetation diverted our thoughts.

To resume, the natives were evidently desirous of carrying on barter, as they gesticulated in a friendly manner.

Dr. Heinroth could not be in camp at first because of a festered finger which rendered him incapable of shooting or writing. So, while the yacht was attending to matters at Herbertshoehe, he spent a few days at Nusa¹ with Herr Boluminski, the chief of the Imperial Station. Joining the camp on the 29th of March.

In the camp were four Europeans, Herr Mencke, Dr. Heinroth, Herr Caro and Hugo Krebs, a sailor, to whom we are indebted for much information. He is now an American citizen, residing in our midst. Besides, there were in the camp 43 blacks, among them 15 police, also shipmen and workmen.

The "Eberhard" left early on the 30th of March to lay in a stock of coal and fresh provisions. In the evening there was rifle practice. The "boys" equipped with army rifles, took as their target the betel palms, mowing them off with the bullets about four feet from the ground. This may have been one reason for the sudden attack on the camp early next morning, as the trees destroyed, no doubt, were regarded as property; or the continuous heavy firing may have been taken by the natives as a challenge to a combat.

Early on Palm Sunday (March 31st, 1901), the cry Kanaka! Kanaka!² was heard. About 8 o'clock from 60 to 80 natives, armed with spears, rushed upon the camp. Dr. Heinroth was not in his tent at the time. Mencke and Caro were lying in their cots. The tent had the form of an elongated Army "A" tent. While Mencke and Caro grasped their revolvers ready for use, a spear wounded the latter in the loin, penetrating his body about a foot. Soon after Herr Mencke was wounded. He and Hugo shot in return according to their strength, but without much result, as little could be seen of the spearmen. The

1. Nusa is an island half way between New Guinea and St. Matthias.
2. "Kana'ka" is the term applied to the native islanders.

Dr. could see only three, one of whom he taught a lesson he will never forget, prostrating him at once.

To move about in the tent was soon impossible, as a large number of spears (perhaps 20) had passed through the canvas and lodged in the cots and their occupants, so that the scene looked like perches in a hen-roost. Unfortunately Herr Caro had ordered a thorough cleaning of the firearms, with a subsequent inspection. All the weapons had been taken apart and could not be used nor put together, in the confusion of the moment. The attack was of short duration. The police did effective work, and within about two minutes from the time the cry was heard, the enemy was put to flight. As soon as the men succeeded in putting together some guns, they began to fire, whereupon the natives fled.

Before the affair was over, Dr. Heinroth became anxious about his comrades. A spear had penetrated beyond the barbs, the upper part of Mencke's left breast and projected about three inches above the armpit. A second spear had gone through his left arm. He wished to be taken to the station as soon as possible. Since there were no tongs or pincers in the camp, Hugo sawed off the spears at the thinnest place, as a preliminary measure. Herr Mencke was then taken down on a cot into one of the boats.

Herr Caro lay dead on his cot. He was wounded in the head, arm, and abdomen. But alas! because of the hurry and lack of room, his corpse could not be removed nor concealed.

Hugo was wounded above the right ear. He fell down as though dead. One of the men pulled out the spear, whereupon he awoke and hastened to get his revolver. The spear had glanced from the skull and made its way between skin and bone to the forehead. His was a narrow escape, but he showed great fortitude and courage in the dilemma.

Dr. Heinroth was lucky beyond measure. He received only one spear wound in the right thigh. But the spear did not

stick. Pursuing its course, it passed on, leaving an ugly gash in the right thigh. So great was the concentration of mind on their defense, that he was not aware that he was wounded. Only because of bloody trousers, boots, and hose, did it become known afterwards.

What now? What was one's first duty? The doctor would rather have kept to the tent and let the cutter of the station fetch the camp equipment as salvage, but Mencke insisted on going immediately to the station, and not without Dr. Heinroth. To leave Hugo alone with the frightened folk was out of the question. He had rendered valuable service and must be taken care of. To their regret almost everything had to be sacrificed. Only bandage material and necessary articles lying around, including two hand-trunks, could be saved.

It seems some of the men had somehow taken possession of the small boat and were on their way off, when Hugo arrived with revolver in hand, so that the fellows waited for the doctor and his companions. One of the best non-commissioned police officers, Townle by name, was dead, a Buka¹ was lying speared on his cot and seven men wounded. 17 Kanakas are said to have fallen.

The trip to the station proved highly uncomfortable, with 30 men in the 26-foot-long boat. They so interfered with each other that only 3 could row at the same time. Herr Mencke, to whom chloroform and morphia were given, was restless. With wind and wave against them, they needed 6½ hours for the trip. At 3 p.m. they arrived.

The administration of the last doses of chloroform, the removal of the spear-heads from the wounds, the lack of proper assistance, bandaging six wounds on Herr Mencke alone—all this must be left to the reader to imagine. Then there were the wounded blacks, all dangerously hurt, then Hugo, and lastly the doctor himself—all needed care and attention. It was time for supper. Messrs. Wohlers and Schlehan, be it said to their

1. Buka Islanders, "black as ebony," are the best fighters of the Bismarck Archipelago.

credit, took pains to provide for the bodily welfare of their guests. Thanks are due them for their kindness.

A competent watch for the night was instituted. Herr Mencke became restless and delirious. The Doctor sat by him during the night. He was conscious only for minutes at a time; otherwise very excitable. In accordance with his position, he gave orders, censured, and managed. Gradually a critical stage set in; all signs of bladder and ureter trouble appeared. The abdomen filled with liquid. A spear which had penetrated the loin must have been the cause. On Monday essentially the same symptoms were present, but accompanied with irregular heart action and accelerated breathing. Now and then he recognized the Doctor and overwhelmed him with kind expressions. During the night he became quieter and on the morning of April 2nd he passed away.

Behind the station, on a slight elevation, a grave was dug, and the corpse, sewed in sail-cloth (wood was scarce), was buried in the earth. Dr. Heinroth made a short address and ordered a triple salute to be fired over the grave.

Thus, one enjoying a fine reputation in his home in Hannover, Germany, blessed with an abundance of this world's goods, esteemed and honored among his fellow-citizens, ended his career at the hands of uncivilized barbarians, in a far-off, almost unknown region, dying a victim of savage ferocity and suffering untold agony. What a blessing that we cannot see what lies ahead of us!" "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." As Burns says:

"The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men,
Gang aft agley,
And leave us nought but grief and pain,
For promised joy."

It seems truly that man proposes but God disposes.

From the conduct of the natives at first it was, no doubt, inferred that they intended to win the confidence of the whites by their friendly action, but evidently the latter forgot the cus-

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tomary means of precaution. The expedition thus became the victim of overconfidence reposed in the barbarians.

The survivors passed the Passion Week inactive, but enjoyed the rest, while recuperating. Hugo's wounds were sometimes real painful, but ere long he was able to attend to his duties. In a few days Dr. Heinroth recovered nicely, but he had suffered considerably. While caring for Herr Mencke, he had frequently procured water for his patient on hands and knees.

One day at 2 p.m. brave officer Topiton, with twelve men, went over to the camp. They found a canoe on the strand, shot three of the crew and broke up the boat. They returned with the news that the whole camp was robbed and destroyed. Even the corpses of the fallen had been dragged off. Five shoes, a stewing pan and a handful of cartridges were brought back. No firearms had been left with the Kanakas.

At 6 p.m., the "Eberhard" appeared and was joyfully greeted. She was quickly boarded. Dr. Heinroth summoned the crew at once and reported that, according to contract, he was now the leader of the expedition. At noon some went to the island, where the enemy were supposed to have their quarters. The police diligently sought for them, but found not a man.

Easter was spent in Nusa. On the third holiday¹ the yacht anchored at Herbertshoehe, and on the 12th of April at Matupi,² whence the official report of the sad fate of the expedition was sent out. On the latter date a telegram was sent with the "Morseby" to Attorney-at-Law Meyer, Hannover, concerning the continuation of the expedition. The report closed by saying that otherwise all was well. Hugo was improving and "I have completely recovered, and our 'boys' for the most part likewise." In a postscript he added that as causes for the attack on the camp, may be mentioned:

1. In some churches, and among some people, Easter and Christmas consist of several holidays.

2. Matupi is a natural harbor on the north coast of New Guinea, 10 m. west of Herbertshoehe.

1. The injury done to the cycads¹ and betel palms.
2. The wrong location of the camp.²

He might have cited also the simultaneous cleaning of the firearms and the absence of the yacht at the time.

"Best wishes from the South Sea,

Dr. Heinroth."

After Herr Mencke's death, Dr. Heinroth, as stated, wrote to his chief's heirs concerning the continuation of the expedition. They, not being interested in deep-sea investigation, ordered it to return. This took time, as the mailboat reached them only every three weeks.

After the return to Germany, Dr. Heinroth lectured with lantern slides in Berlin. He had taken views of persons, plants, animals, and various scenes and events connected with the trip to and stay in the Tropics. The lectures were interesting and were well received.

After such disasters it was the custom to send a punitive expedition to chastise the natives for attacking the invaders, as they were regarded, and for loss of life inflicted. This custom was followed in this case. The Samoan News of Aug. 17, 1901, contained an account of this punitive expedition.

The Cruiser "Cormoran" was sent to the main island, but no natives were found. Hence in the middle of June it proceeded to a small neighboring island, 50 colored police, brought from Herbertshoehe penetrated the woods and the crew of the "Cormoran" made their way along the coast. The natives fled before the whites, but offered resistance to the colored police. They fled to limestone caves in the center of the island, and thence hurled their spears. Probably 100 natives were killed and wounded in two days. Not one grown-up man, but several women and children were captured. They were taken to Herbertshoehe and placed in the Mission Institute. Through them

1. Cycads are a species of low evergreen trees with palm-like leaves. They bear a stone fruit, which is edible. They abound in the tropics.

2. The camp was wrongly located in that it was pitched along a path used by the natives; the "Eberhard" was over 10 m. distant; the camp was placed on a steep bank; it had no means of defense.

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information of occurrences on the island group is expected to be obtained. Later they can explain to their kin that no ill will is harbored against them.

Towards the close of 1901, a voyage will be made to German settlements starting from Samoa¹ and returning in November, visiting Jaluit,² Ponape,³ Jap,⁴ and the Palau Islands.⁵ In February, 1902, the Bismarck Islands⁶ received a call, whence a return was made to Sydney, Australia, in May.

Thus the "South Sea Adventure" comes to a close, prospects bright, hopes blasted, and results quite different from what were expected, is the story. And yet our unsuccessful projects are not altogether fruitless. If we hitch our wagon to a star, we are gainers, though we do not reach the star. If we are actuated by proper motives, we, nevertheless, benefit by reason of the efforts put forth and the self-denial undergone to attain our ends. Thus we are better prepared for future enterprises.

THOS. S. STEIN.

Allentown, Pa., July, 1930.

1. Samoa or Navigator Is., 170° W. Long., 10° S. Lat.
2. Jaluit is the commercial emporium of the Marshall Is.

3. Ponape, one of the Caroline Is.

4. Jap or Yap is an island 10 m. long, N.E. of the Pelew Is.

5. The Pelew or Palau Is. are the western section of the widely scattered archipelago of the Caroline Is.

6. The Bismarck Archipelago is N.E. of New Guinea.

- All of these islands, except Samoa and the Bismarck Archipelago, are since the World War, under a Japanese mandate; the Bismarck Is. are under the mandate of Australia.

BRIEF SKETCH OF HUGO KREBS

(Mr. Krebs was one of the participants in the "South Sea Adventure," but is now an American citizen.)

Mr. Krebs was born July 28th, 1883, in Altenburg, Germany. After his school days he thought of pursuing a business career. He found employment in a wholesale and retail tobacco store. The prospect was not very bright, so he changed and worked in the wholesale leather business. This also seemed dull and tame to him.

At this time his uncle was engaged in business in a building where Bruno Mencke had his residence. The latter was planning an expedition to the South Sea. Young Krebs had a strong wanderlust, and here was an opportunity to gratify it! He secured an interview with Herr Mencke and made personal application to become a member of the expedition's crew. He succeeded in obtaining his request. Herr Mencke took a great liking to young Krebs. He was favored in being the only member of the crew that went ashore at unusual places. From a boy before the mast, he gradually became an able seaman, within a year's time.

After passing through the blood-curdling scenes in the South Sea, he returned home and obtained a position with the Hamburg-American Steamship Line, making five trips between Hamburg, Boston, and Philadelphia.

Now he decided to come to America to better his condition. Accordingly he landed July 28th, 1902. He thought farming offered the best chance for a young man. He spent two years in Wyoming and Colorado, after which he returned to Pennsylvania to engage in railroading and acquire more capital for farming. He is now engaged as an engineer on the Philadelphia

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Division of the Pennsylvania Railroad, making trips between Harrisburg and Philadelphia.

Mr. Krebs resides on a farm of 107 acres in East Hanover Township, Lebanon County. Four of his daughters have graduated from the Annville High School and one boy and two girls are now students in Lebanon Valley College, Annville, Pa. In February, 1931, one of the girls will enter the Misericordia Training for Nurses, in Philadelphia.

The family is now enjoying more peaceful days than the South Sea could offer.

THOS. S. STEIN

Allentown, Pa., January, 1931.

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